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ABSTRACT

The paper describes application of the collaborative/consultant model to the education of special needs students in the Mendocino Unified School District (California), a small rural district. Benefits of the model for students include reduction of stigma attached to labeling and pull-out, and for teachers, shared responsibility for instruction. At the elementary level the student study team utilizes a team problem-solving approach to develop strategies for modification of regular education classrooms to better accommodate the student with learning problems. At the high school level staffing is an intervention strategy in which the highest priority of each faculty meeting is the discussion of students about whom teachers have concerns. The resource specialist has collaborated with the regular teacher to provide direct instruction in the regular classroom to students having problems with spelling, language arts, mathematics, and computer skills. At the secondary level the resource specialist serves as the advisor to students with individualized educational programs, the provision of remedial support classes, and cooperative teaching of some regular classes. (DB)

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MAINSTREAMING THE RESOURCE SPECIALIST

Providing instruction for special needs students in a rural school situation has its own joys and limitations. It also presents challenges for creative solutions.

A number of factors impact upon services available to handicapped students in rural school districts. Specifically: sparcity of population, sensitivity in school and community relationships, vocational and career opportunities, and the need to stretch available resources. This places unique constraints upon decision-making when planning programs and instruction for handicapped pupils.

All special education programs currently face the difficulties of finite resources and the negative impact of the "pull-out" approach. As resources diminish and numbers of students identified with learning difficulties increase, it becomes necessary to consider alternatives to the widely used "pull-out" approach. This has been the predominant strategy for structuring programs to improve the educational attainment of students with special learning needs. "Pull-out" has led to discontinuity and interruption of instruction for teachers as well as fostering categorical attitudes and instruction.

An alternative that has received much attention recently is the collaborative/consultant model. Current research supports the concept that a comprehensive approach, combining the best features of both regular and special education, offers the best chance of overcoming the disjointedness of present categorical programs.

If students with special learning needs are to progress and become fully integrated into regular classes, regular and special education staff must work together to establish new partnerships. Coordinated delivery systems combine methods that have a strong research record of effectiveness with comprehensive systems which have evolved from both programs.

Madeline C. Will, Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation services, U.S. Department of Education, has issued several papers pertaining to a shared responsibility between general and special education. She states that . . ."Beyond failing to provide services for a large number of students who need more intensive instruction, it is also believed that another consequence of the categorical system is the 'tendancy to equate poor performance with a handicap. . . and the stigmatization of students who have been placed in categorical programs'. Often the results are lowered academic and social expectations, on the part of students themselves, as well as their peers and their teachers, which can lead to poor performance and an inability to learn effectively.

Categorical programs frequently address failure, rather than prevention, and professionals who could help correct incipient problems during the early developmemtal stages are prevented from doing so by lack of authorization."

EC 211 010

Implementation of the collaborative/consultant model offers exciting and positive possibilities for both students and teachers:

For students: reduction of stigma attached to labeling and pull-out; less disruption of the instructional program; opportunities for understanding and appreciation by both handicapped and non-handicapped students of individual differences; appropriate peer role models; greater opportunity for participation in core curriculum; improved self-esteem; and greater personal independence.

For teachers: shared responsibility for instruction; awareness and understanding of the nature of learning problems and behavior disorders; reduction in duplication of services; reduction in the rate of inappropriate referrals; ability to serve and/or influence more students; opportunities for educators to share their knowledge, techniques, and expertise; a mutual support system; and improved communication.

Belief in the collaborative/consultant model has inspired the special education staff in our district to consider alternatives to the traditional services model.

MENDOCINO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

We are a small, rural district located along the Northern California coast, approximately 200 miles north of San Francisco. We have a student population of approximately 900 students within a 450 square mile area. Special Education services are available to elementary students at four locations: one K-5 site, two satellite schools, and one alternative/independent study school site. Services for secondary students are provided at our middle school, high school, and community school. Full-time Resource Specialists are responsible for co-ordinating the instruction and support services to our special needs population. Instructional Assistants, a Speech Therapist, an Adapted P.E. teacher, School Nurse, and two School Psychologists are contracted on a part-time basis for DIS, or Designated Instructional Support Services.

STRATEGIES: STUDENT STUDY TEAM, STAFFING, AB 777

Strategies implemented in our district to achieve a more fully integrated special education services model include Student Study Teams at the elementary level, Staffing at the high school level, and California's AB 777, or School-Based Coordination Act.

At our elementary school Student Study Team, or SST, is essentially a regular education staff responsibility that utilizes a team problem-solving approach to assist in the development of strategies for modification of regular education classrooms to better accomodate the student with learning problems. A team was identified and received training in the SERN model. This team consists of: the site administrator, one primary and one intermediate classroom teacher, Resource Specialists, the School Psychologist, the Chapter I teacher, and the parent. The SST meets bi-monthly to review students referred by regular eduction teachers. Students reviewed are not automatically referred for special education assessment. In fact, it is through this process that alternatives to referral may be recommended and implemented prior to referral for assessment. Recommendations are recorded and given to team members. Follow-up assures that recommendations are monitored. This process has created an environment where problem-solving student needs has become a responsibility shared by regular and special education staff and home and school communication is improved. There is also an opportunity for early intervention for students at risk.

Staffing is an intervention strategy that has been effective at the secondary level in assurring classroom modifications prior to referral to special education. The highest priority of each bi-monthly faculty meeting is the discussion of students that teachers have concerns about. A whole- staff problem-solving session generates recommendations which are then recorded by the school secretary. The high school counselor is then responsible for monitoring any action taken on the recommendations and reporting the outcomes at the next staff meeting.

At our alternative high school site the RST participates in weekly staff meetings. In addition to discussing the progress of the mainstreamed RSP students, we are able to Staff any other students teachers are concerned about. This process is particularly effective in a small, rural high school where all teachers, the couselor, and principal can meet regularly.

Adoption of AB 777, California's School Based Coordination Act, allows our schools greater flexibility in management and coordination of categorical programs with continued emphasis on the integration of special needs pupils. It breaks down the categorical barriers to meeting the needs of all students and has facilitated collaborative planning between regular and special education staff. Students can be grouped according to their instructional needs regardless of their label. AB 777 provides that a school may include any one or more of eleven categorical programs in its coordinated school program. If a school includes special education in its coordinated plan, the school must comply with all requirements of special education law and regulations. However there are two significant differences: (1) resource specialist and designated instruction services may be provided to pupils who have <u>not</u> been identified as individuals with exceptional needs; (2) programs for special education students shall be under the direction of special education personnel, but services may be provided entirely by personnel not funded by special education monies, provided that all services specified in the IEP are received by the pupil.

Participation in AB 777 requires that a program plan approved by the local governing board and the local School Site Council be on file, listing the participating categorical programs and contain explicit statements of what the school seeks to accomplish. The school plan must provide for the needs of identified students, staff development, program evaluation, appropriate program expenditures, utilization of other resources, and specify the role and function of the SST as it relates to high-risk pupils.

ELEMENTARY LEVEL

Strategies, paritcularly in the early grades, designed to deliver systematic and organized intervention in the regular classroom can prevent learning difficulties from becoming learning disabilities. By consolidating categorical services, all students receive a broader range of service options with less duplication of services. All students then may have equal access to support personnel, individual tutoring, and modification of curriculum materials.

At the elementary level, concerns about the lack of student progress in our adopted spelling program, Mastery Spelling (SRA), demonstrated the need to consider alternative strategies and materials for spelling instruction at the first and second grade levels.

First grade students usually complete Spelling 'A' in the first grade. However, not all students demonstrate the same level of readiness at the same time. And, many pupils have not developed the skills necessary to proceed on to Spelling 'B'. Making decisions about grouping then becomes a problem.

Meeting with the regular education staff to resolve this issue led to implementation of a collaborative teaching strategy combining the teaching skills of the RST and regular education teacher for spelling instruction.

Following administration of a placement test, students were grouped according to instructional levels. A direct instruction program, Signs for Sounds, was selected for students not ready for Spelling 'B'. This program introduces phonics patterns sequentially, reinforces skills through repetition, and is success oriented.

Teaming the RST and regular education teacher has provided opportunities for demonstration teaching and modeling of instructional skills. Students often fail and learning disabilities are emphasized when the focus of instruction is limited to workbooks, textbooks, and rote memorization. All students participating in the alternative spelling program have been successful as shown by our post-test results.

The success of this collaborative teaching experience has motivated me to consider other areas of instruction where this model could be effective:

(1) This year our Self Study and Quality Review revealed the need to focus upon our school's reading and language arts curriculum. Most learning disability pupils receive reading instruction via a "pull-out" approach. An alternative we have tried is that of assisting classroom teachers and LD students with instruction within the regualr classroom setting.

(2) Adoption of the REAL MATH (Open Court) program this year has begun to change math instruction within the classroom. Regular education staff have received training and in-service in MATH THEIR WAY, EQUALS, and AIMS. Research demonstrates that development of math concepts through a language approach is particularly effective for not only LD students, but for all children. Collaborative teaching could easily be implemented in this subject area.

(3) Computer skills instruction is available to all 4th and 5th grade pupils. Instruction takes place daily for forty-five minutes in the computer lab and emphasizes keyboarding and word processing. These skills are reinforced and supported by the resource staff through computer lab assistance and follow-up activities.

Strategies that support the collaborative/consultant model include: team teaching, demonstration teaching of instructional skills, shared materials, resource teacher in the classroom, flexible grouping of students based on individual needs versus categorical labels, colleague coaching, and cooperative learning techniques.

The role and responsibilities of the Resource Specialist are changing. Identifying teachers who are willing to try alternative teaching strategies and who are supportive of the collaborative teaching philosophy is the first step toward the success of this model.

SECONDARY LEVEL

Basic to Mainstreaming the Resource Specialist at the secondary level is having the same responsibilities for adjunct duties as all other faculty members. The RST is expected to have the same involvement as regular education staff with all students in activities such as supervision of sporting events and chaperoning of school dances.

Because of our high school's Advisorship Program, the RST's are able to control scheduling of students on their case loads. The RST's advisees are students with IEP's. Our Advisorship Program helps eliminate potential stigma for students involved in the Resource Program since ALL students have an advisor. The RST is identified as 'advisor', not 'special education' teacher.

In August, before school begins, a day is devoted to faculty training in: courses available, their prerequisites, graduation requirements, and college entrance requirements. Each high school student has a faculty advisor who is responsible for scheduling and advising. This program relieves the counselor of the burden of scheduling and offers a personal contact for each student and their parents for the duration of the student's high school career.

Over the past five years, Mendocino High School's Resource Program has offered support classes to help learning handicapped students succeed in content area courses. Support classes in World History and Applied Science, usually ninth grade courses, support student success in regular courses and provide remedial instruction of reading, vocabulary, writing and study skills. Support is provided in the form of assisting students in completion of some - not all - homework and preparation for exams. Students receive elective credit for attending support courses. The U.S. History support class taught this year emphasizes study skills for tenth and eleventh graders.

Small groups of learning disabled students receive tutorial instruction in English classes, advanced math and science, and American Government. This instruction is provided by student aides and RSP Instructional Assistants. Both Resource Specialists at the high school are scheduled to teach five of seven daily class periods. Additional responsibilities include providing RSP services at the nearby alternative high school. Instruction in paraphrasing, word identification, and sentence writing, (Strategies Intervention Model, University of Kansas), and remedial math courses are offerred at both sites.

An innovation this year has been that of the RST and history teacher co-teaching a World History class. Planning for this course began last spring when we began putting together the '87-'88 schedule. In an effort to meet more frequently to plan the usual support class, we looked into the possibility of scheduling a common prep period. This led to the idea of replacing the support class with a cooperative teaching model. Since our history teacher is an open, cooperative, dedicated educator, the chances for this venture to be successful were very good.

Having time daily to plan together has been critical to the success of this venture. This class is a regular education history class of 23 students, highly tracked with students having learning difficulties and/or Spanish-speaking students. Because we're in the classroom together, we are able to continually monitor each other's instructional skills, the students' progress, and the materials and activities.

Responsibilities of the history instructor include the teaching of three other sections of World History, two periods of P.E., and coaching the boy's varsity basketball team. We spend 15 - 30 minutes daily adapting curriculum for our third period class. Modifications include: reading the text aloud to the class, instead of assigning it as homework; always reading the exams to the class; and making arrangements for space and monitoring exams for those students who don't finish.

The class is reading *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury. We have acquired taped versions of the book from the state's Aural Media Services and Spanish translations from a Los Angeles bookstore. Material is often taught by films, games, and lectures. We co-jointly plan an opening warm-up activity dealing with the current history lesson that includes teaching understanding and recognition of vocabulary; improvement of reading comprehension and study skills; and encouragement of promptness, since this activity always occurs within the first five minutes of class.

In our planning we take nothing for granted. We ask ourselves daily: "What is most important for them to learn from this lesson?" The answer is usually a critical thinking skill, such as: "Find the supporting statements for a generalization or recognition of cause and effect."

According to the history teacher the team-taught class has had an impact upon the teaching of his other classes. He finds that he takes less for granted, assigns homework more thoughtfully, has been able to use many of our opening basic skills activities, and feels less need to cover the history of the world in ten months. "What is most important for them to learn?"

As plans for next year begin to formulate, I anticipate the possibility of co-teaching another class with another teacher. I will continue to inter-act with the history teacher, but more as consultant than as team-teacher, conferencing for the modification of materials and instruction. For the first time the Resource Program will not offer a World History support class. Because our school's philosophy is against tracking students, learning handicapped students will be dispersed throughout various sections of the World History classes. Mainstreaming students having similar strengths and weaknesses in the same classes will facilitate scheduling. For example: non-readers in one section, poor spellers and writers in another, and those with low reading comprehension and vocabulary skills in yet another.

CONCLUSIONS

The goal of the collaborative/consultant model is the education of the exceptional student in the Least Restrictive Environment with achievement equal to that of a "pull-out" program.

Elements critical to the success of this model are: administrative receptivity and support, collaborative planning, shared decision-making among professionals, flexibility, a school climate that supports a process for problem-solving, opportunities for training in these skills, and realistic timelines for implementation.

School programs must find ways to more completely integrate students with special learning needs using all forms of knowledge on how best to proceed with instruction. The collaborative/consultant model of special education is a fresh approach to breaking down the barriers between special and regular education programs and has exciting possibilities in forming partnerships to provide quality education for all children.